

‘Dangerous Minds’? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the ‘Psychological Vulnerability’ of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain

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Abstract

Current British Government strategies to counter terrorism (exemplified in the *Prevent* policy and *Channel* programme) are based upon a problematic fusion of certain dominant explanatory models of the ‘causes of terrorism’ (specifically, ‘psychological vulnerability’ to ‘radicalisation’) with discourses of ‘child protection/safeguarding’. Derived from particular mainstream traditions of social scientific epistemology and inquiry, these knowledge paradigms ‘legitimise’ a pre-emptive, interventionist and securitising approach that affects the lives of young British Muslims. The aim of this article is to challenge some of the assumptions that underpin the understanding of ‘radicalisation’, ‘psychological vulnerability’ and ‘child protection’ evidenced in these state practices and policies.

Introduction

Prevailing British counter-terrorist law, policy and practice rest upon a series of assumptions, arguments and perspectives that, in turn, are grounded in paradigms of knowledge derived from particular mainstream traditions of social scientific epistemology and inquiry. These paradigmatic social science frames, for example those derived from strands of psychology and social movement theory (Sageman, 2004; Silke, 2010; Victoroff, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005), allege to provide explanations of the supposed roots of ‘radicalisation’, political Islam and ‘extremist violence’, as well as the supposed appeal of all three to certain sections of young British Muslims.

As the object of the discursive construction not only of the ‘Islamic terrorist other’, but also of those supposedly susceptible to ‘radicalisation’, young British Muslims are therefore constituted as ‘vulnerable’ in politically powerful ways, as the ‘would-be terrorist’. This is shaped not only by particular, ideologically-charged and contentious ideas about how ‘radicalisation’ allegedly takes place, but also by constructing both the ‘Islamic’ and ‘child’ selves of young British

Muslims in very specific ways. It is a process within which essentialised ethnic and racial identities are married to equally problematic constructions of 'childhood'. Vulnerability is also framed within specific, and again deeply problematic, conceptions of young people's mental health and well-being (DeMause, 2002; Lifton, 2007). Devoid of meaningful social and political agency, divorced from the structural circumstances of their lived experiences, and problematised in terms of their mental well-being, young British Muslims are thus rendered as appropriate objects for state intervention and surveillance. Similarly, dominant administrative discourses of 'child protection' are securitised and deployed to underpin this interventionist ethos and state surveillance practice to produce the 'young British Muslim' as both 'suspect' and in need of being 'saved' (Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), undated; Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2010; HM Government, 2012a; 2012b).

Viewing these issues through a critical lens and rooted in a tradition of critical social inquiry, the aim of this article is to challenge the social scientific paradigms mobilised in this ideological project, to contest the assumptions they purport to 'legitimise', and the arguments they present concerning the roots of 'radicalisation', the nature of 'vulnerability' and the need for 'protection' that impact via state practices on the lives and identities of young British Muslims. The paper will be divided into 3 parts. Part 1 will provide a contextual overview of the social and political backcloth framing counter-terrorism law, policy and practice in Britain since 2001, outlining key strategic developments. Crucially, it will be argued that these strategies rely upon particular, and perhaps purposefully flexible, narratives of 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' that, in turn, reinforce the construction of British Muslim youth as a 'suspect community', justifying state surveillance practices and interventions. Part 2 will outline and critically examine key contributions from within psychology and social movement theory that purport to explain the supposed roots of 'radicalisation', political Islam and 'extremist violence' and that have directly informed the development of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation technologies and practices in Britain. Part 3, will involve a textual analysis of official policy documentation and practice guidance on identifying and 'safeguarding' 'vulnerable' children and young people from being drawn into terrorism to reveal problematic discursive constructions of 'childhood vulnerability' and children's mental health and well-being that prefigure and inform equally problematic constructions and practices of 'child protection'/'safeguarding'. The role of Eurocentric conceptions of childhood will be highlighted and how these relate to the construction of the 'vulnerable young Muslim other' as 'would-be terrorist'. Consideration will be given to the implications of this for children's practitioners

expected to operationalise these official frameworks, specifically in facilitating the extension of Foucauldian practices of governance and discipline of young British Muslims – practices that may be seen to reproduce and perpetuate institutional anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia.

Contextualising ‘counter-terrorism’ and ‘counter-radicalisation’ law, policy and practice in Britain

Against the backdrop of foreign wars, most notably the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, the ‘war on terror’ of the post-9/11 decade gave rise domestically to both a swathe of ‘anti-terror’ legislation and policy initiatives and an avalanche of academic literature purporting to ‘explain’ the rise of ‘new terrorism’ (Field, 2009; Jackson, 2009; Neumann, 2009; Spencer, 2011). In terms of the former, in the UK major legislation included the (pre-9/11) Terrorism Act 2000, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, the Terrorism Act 2006 and the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 (Walker, 2011). These acts gave sweeping and vastly increased new powers of stop and search, surveillance, arrest and detention, as well as creating new crimes, for example, the dissemination of material deemed to ‘glorify terrorism’. While ostensibly directed at all forms of ‘extremism’ (including Far Right groups and individuals) such legislative measures also impacted disproportionately, and negatively, upon Muslims in Britain, raising fears of an unstated policy of ‘racial profiling’ in policing practice and the application of the law, and leading many critics to argue that British Muslims were a new ‘suspect community’ (Hickman and others, 2012; McGovern, 2010; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; 2011).

For example, the decade witnessed a huge increase in the use of the much-expanded ‘stop and search’ powers provided for by section 44 and section 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. This included the ability to stop and search without the requirement of reasonable suspicion, until the European Court declared this in contravention of the European Convention of Human Rights in 2010. In the aftermath of the 7th July bombings 2005, the number of people stopped under Section 44 jumped from 37,197 in 2006-2007 to 117,278 in 2007-2008. The number of Asians stopped under these powers in this period increased 277%, as compared to 185% for white people (Travis, 2009). In their 2010 ruling the European Court noted they were ‘struck by the statistical and other evidence’ that both Black and Asian people were disproportionately affected by these powers (Amnesty International, 2010). One analysis found that Asians were 42 times more likely than white people to be stopped and held under Section 7

(Dodd, 2011). Human Rights Watch argued such evidence suggested the 'police may be engaging in ethnic profiling in deciding whom to stop' (2010: 1). Concerns remain that the resort to other powers (such as section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act) are options that continue the practice of racial profiling (Townsend, 2012).

Such powers have also impacted disproportionately on young people, and young Muslims in particular. A recent study shows that ethnic minority youth continue to be significantly over-policed via stop and search practices (Medina Ariza, 2013). Police stops are the most regular contact between the police and young Muslims and have had a profound chilling effect on levels of trust and confidence in police-community relations (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011). Taken with other surveillance and counter-terror measures the cumulative impact of such 'pervasive scrutiny' is to create a climate of suspicion and paranoia that itself contributes to a range of mental health issues and a need on the part of young Muslims to 'manage, express and conceal' their 'risky identities' (Mythen, Walklate and Khan, 2009: 750). While beyond the scope of this article, this construction of 'risky' Muslim identities also rests on the longer-term pathologisation and imagined 'threat' of Muslim masculinities and young Muslim men as a 'new folk devil' (Alexander, 2000).

Central to this decade-long programme of 'anti-terror' policy-making is *CONTEST*. First introduced by the Blair-led Labour Government in 2003, updated in 2006 and again, by the Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government in 2011, *CONTEST* is the British Government's overarching counter-terror strategy, the stated goal of which is 'to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism' (HM Government, 2011a: 40). *CONTEST* sets out a series of measures and approaches to policy and practice organised into 4 strands; '*Pursue*', '*Prevent*', '*Protect*' and '*Prepare*'. Perhaps the most contentious of these is *Prevent* which, as the name suggests, constitutes the 'preventative strand' of the Government's strategy with a self-declared aim to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' (HM Government, 2011b: 6). The process whereby people either become terrorists or come to support terrorism is understood as one of 'radicalisation' and thus 'preventing radicalisation' is the central platform of this agenda (Jackson, 2009; Kundnani, 2012).

Kundnani argues that ‘the concept of radicalisation has become the master signifier of the late “war on terror”’ (2012: 3) and provided a ‘vehicle for policy-makers’ who required a language through which they could discuss the supposed ‘causes of terrorism’ while at the same time delimiting the boundaries of what it was permissible to include in any explanatory framework (2012: 4). A focus on ‘radicalisation’ establishes the *a priori assumption* that the search for the ‘causes of terrorism’ is essentially to be found at the level of the attitudes and actions of the individual, the task at hand therefore established as the ‘rooting out of future terrorists rather than what might be thought of as root causes’ (McCulloch and Pickering, 2009: 629).

There are several problems with the idea of radicalisation, not least of which is a distinct lack of clarity as to what it actually means (Mandel, 2009; Richards, 2011). Such open-ended vagueness may not, however, be entirely unintentional, allowing as it does for the re-construction, re-interpretation and re-articulation of what constitutes ‘radicalisation’ and the potential widening of a net of applicability to various individuals, groups, attitudes and actions. Certainly, while there was a significant degree of continuity between the approach to *CONTEST* and *Prevent* between the Labour and Coalition Governments, one important shift in the 2011 *CONTEST III* document was the identification of ‘non-violent extremism’ as crucial to process of ‘radicalisation’. As with the idea of ‘radicalisation’, “‘extremism’ is a vague concept that is easily exploited to demonise anyone whose opinions are radically different’ (Institute of Race Relations, 2010: 79). The worrying nature of the scope of a term such as ‘radicalisation’ might be judged by the definition provided by Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen (Director of the Preventative Security Department of the Danish Security and Intelligence Service) one of the counter-terror experts cited as a key authority in *Prevent* (HM Government, 2011b: 17).

A radical is understood as a person harbouring a deep-felt desire for fundamental socio-political change and radicalisation is understood as a growing readiness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a direct threat to, the existing order. (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 798)

Notably, it is a definition in which no reference to advocating or using violence is felt necessary to count someone as a ‘radical’.

The *Prevent* strategy understands that ‘ideology is a central factor in the radicalisation process’ (HM Government, 2011: 40-44). As a result, one of its

key objectives is to 'respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism' by undertaking 'counter-ideological work' designed to ensure that there should be 'no ungoverned spaces in which extremism is allowed to flourish' (HM Government, 2011: 9). 'Radicalisation' here stands as a particular model for 'explaining' the causes of terrorism; understood as a process whereby 'extremist ideas' are propagated and disseminated by key activists and thinkers who therefore 'radicalise' others because of their 'vulnerabilities' to such a message. Identifying the nature of such 'vulnerabilities' therefore also emerges as a crucial means of preventing 'radicalisation'. Following from this, the other identified key objectives are to prevent *individuals* being drawn into 'extremism' and to diminish the 'risks of radicalisation' within a number of institutional settings (including, notably, schools, colleges and universities). To this end, a core component of *Prevent*, and at the forefront of the Government's 'anti-radicalisation' work, is the *Channel* programme - overseen by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office (HM Government, 2010; 2012a).

Originally set up in 2007, *Channel* involves the identification of individuals in England and Wales deemed to be vulnerable to recruitment to extremism. It is a multi-agency programme that relies upon the vigilance and cooperation of social workers, youth workers, health workers and teachers in assisting the local police in identifying those 'at risk of extremism'. These individuals are then referred for a programme of intervention 'tailored to their needs' aimed at stemming their journey towards extremism. From 2007–2010 *Channel* practitioners identified 1,120 individuals as being on a pathway to radicalisation. Although the programme primarily targets 15 -24-year-olds, 290 of those identified were under 16 years old and fifty-five were under 12. While, in theory, *CONTEST*, *Prevent* and *Channel* are declared to be directed at tackling all forms of 'radicalisation' and 'extremism', including Far Right activities, it is surely significant that of those identified as being on a pathway to extremism, over 90 per cent were Muslim (ACPO, 2011).

In its 2013 annual report on *Strategy for Countering Terrorism* the UK government indicated that between January 2007 and April 2012 more than 2,500 referrals were made to *Channel* and over 500 people had received 'support', although no breakdown according to age was provided (HM Government, 2013). The kinds of 'support' given to individuals following referral include: life skills; mentoring support; anger management; constructive pursuits; education skills; careers; family support; health awareness; housing support;

drugs and alcohol awareness. In 2010-11 *Prevent* was revised and its scope and focus extended. Since then, local authorities have been required to merge *Prevent* into other aspects of their work, including child protection. *Channel* has also been extended and is now firmly embedded within formal children's 'safeguarding' protocols and practices (DCSF, 2010; HM Government, 2012a).

Social Science in the Service of the State: The Psychologisation of Dissent

The conceptualisation of 'radicalisation', 'extremism' and the explanatory framework for 'terrorism' evident in *Prevent* and *Channel* rests upon particular social scientific paradigms that evidence what might be understood as the 'psychologisation of social problems'. As noted earlier, alongside the rise in counter-terror laws and invasive policies, the post-9/11 period has seen an explosion of academic literature on terrorism and counter-terror practice. These twin processes are intimately interlinked. Overwhelmingly, academic studies of the nature and 'causes' of terrorism, and particularly of what has come to be known as 'new terrorism', have tended to focus on approaches to the subject that have in turn provided an underpinning intellectual rationale for state policy. As Kundnani argues, very much to the fore are analyses that emphasise 'cultural and psychological predispositions' alongside small group and social network dynamics that, if identified, can provide state officials with a supposedly scientific basis for 'indicators of risk' of 'vulnerability to radicalisation' (2012: 10). The result has been a discernible shift away from the examination of the political context of acts of terrorism towards a search for social and psychological factors contributing to the acquisition of a 'terrorist mind-set' (Moghaddam, 2005; Sageman, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005).

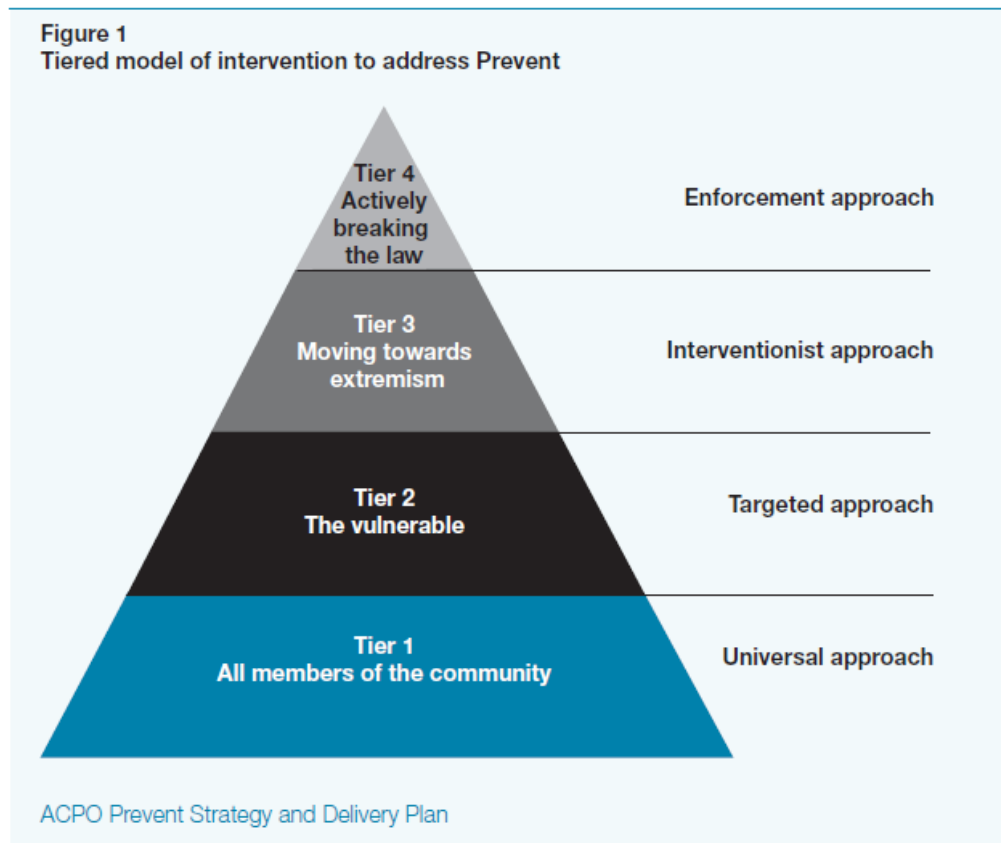
Such approaches have also reflected wider academic and intellectual trends - specifically a general growing pre-occupation and cultural expansion of the categories of 'psychological vulnerability' in a wide range of areas of contemporary social life (Furedi, 2003 McLaughlin, 2010). 'Emotional dysfunction' and emotion-based explanations have come to dominate much public discourse on everything from racism and poverty to the environment and the causes of war, indeed, 'of virtually every form of social breakdown' (Furedi, 2003: 26). The result has been a wholesale recasting of 'social and cultural problems as psychological ones' (Furedi, 2003: 27). One important consequence (evident, for example, in the model of 'therapeutic governance' that has accompanied western military intervention in places like the Former Yugoslavia and Iraq) is the denial of political agency through people being both

‘racialised’ and ‘pathologised’ (Howell, 2010; Pupavac, 2001).

In turn, this ‘psychologisation of social problems’ has been very much in evidence in the development of policies around children (Burman, 2012; Coppock, 2011). In this sense, there is a parallel process evident with the *Channel* programme of the adoption and co-option of the problematic conceptualisation of children and young people by the state that also rests upon certain dominant strands of knowledge production that regulate the ‘spaces of childhood’ more generally. It is therefore necessary to critically reflect further upon the role of social science in this policy-making project, to explore the discourses, logics and knowledge claims of these twin strands of (primarily academic) inquiry that, taken together, shape this figure of ‘vulnerable young Muslim Other’ ripe for state surveillance and intervention. Although it is not possible to provide a detailed examination of such an extensive literature within the limited space of this article, some of the most influential contributions are highlighted for analysis. (See also Christmann, 2012, for a very useful comprehensive systematic review of the scholarly literature on the process(es) of radicalisation, particularly among young people).

The growing focus on a ‘pathways’ model of understanding the ‘causes of terrorism’, and its concomitant emphasis on youth and youth transitions, has been driven by the failure within mainstream terrorism studies (despite significant efforts to do so) to establish a credible explanatory model based on individual ‘psychopathology’ or a supposed ‘terrorist personality’. Even prior to 9/11 Martha Crenshaw (2000: 409), a leading figure in the psychological study of terrorism argued that terrorism was ‘typically not the result of psychopathology of a single personality type’ and that ‘one of the basic research findings of the field is that terrorism is primarily a group activity’. As a result contended Crenshaw (2000: 409), and in no small way laying the foundations for much of what was to follow, it is ‘shared ideological commitment and group solidarity’ that are ‘more important determinants of terror behaviour’. This line of thought became all the more prominent in the post-9/11 period as the apparent ‘normality and ordinariness’ Christmann (2012: 23) of western-based ‘Islamist terrorists’ (such as those involved in the 7th July 2005 London attacks) confounded any attempt to scientifically ground a model of individual mental illness as a key explanatory factor (Borum, 2010). As a result, the ‘causes of terrorism’ became increasingly explored as a complex and dynamic process, in which ‘individuals’ were replaced by ‘networks’, ‘traits’ by ‘vulnerabilities’ and ‘characteristics’ by ‘pathways’. This provided an overarching context for the emergence of several models, premised on

identifying distinct, identifiable phases of the ‘radicalisation process’, such as ACPO’s ‘*Prevent* pyramid’ tiered model of intervention (see Figure 1), developed following the introduction of the *Prevent* Strategy in 2007.



Source: Audit Commission, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (2008) *Preventing Violent Extremism: Learning and Development Exercise. Report to the Home Office and Communities and Local Government*, p.12.

<http://www.hmic.gov.uk/media/preventing-violent-extremism-learning-and-development-exercise-20080930.pdf> [Accessed 21 June 2013].

This model assumes ‘an implicit and linear relationship between the process of radicalisation and ultimately, for some, participation in terrorism’ (Christmann, 2012: 11), although the relationship between the tiers and how a person moves between them remains unclear. Similar theoretical models that aim to capture the radicalisation process as more ‘unpredictable and complicated’, have informed subsequent revisions of *Prevent* (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005; Sageman, 2004, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005). These focus heavily on identifying the different social and psychological processes that

establish 'vulnerabilities' which, in turn, contribute to 'pathways to terrorism'.

As *Prevent* suggests, policy decisions are predicated on academic analysis and perspectives that 'emphasise that radicalisation is a social process particularly prevalent in small groups. Radicalisation is about "who you know". Group bonding, peer pressure and indoctrination are necessary to encourage the view that violence is a legitimate response to perceived injustice' (HM Government, 2011: 17). Central here is the work of the highly influential American psychiatrist and former CIA officer Marc Sageman (2004; 2008). Sageman has developed what has become known as the 'bunch of guys' theory which essentially argues that informal social networks, peer groups and friendship and kinship bonds are the primary sites and processes of radicalisation particularly amongst the young. Indeed the bonds of childhood and youth friendships are crucial to the conceptualisation of group dynamics that Sageman therefore identifies as crucial to understanding the 'cause of terrorism'. For policy makers and state agencies, tasked with identifying 'risk' factors and developing timely interventions designed to disrupt the radicalisation process preferably before 'violent extremism' is evident, the consequence of such thinking are as clear as they are far-reaching. They have to develop means to surveil and police such informal social spaces and networks, identify 'vulnerable' individuals and ensure that there are 'no ungoverned spaces in which extremism is allowed to flourish' (HM Government, 2011: 9).

As Kundnani (2012) observes, the core problem with the cultural-psychological theorisation underpinning contemporary 'vulnerability to radicalisation' discourse and practices is that it claims predictive power but lacks explanatory power. It draws attention to patterns of belief and behaviour that correlate with 'terrorist risk' irrespective of whether they cause terrorism. It is a shift from macro-structural to micro-process based explanations, from a focus on social order to social bonds and from injustice to individual psychological processes. There are obvious parallels here with wider critiques of classical positivistic psychological theories, processes and practices (see Sloan, 2000). Positivistic psychology has always held enormous appeal to those looking for shortcuts or simple solutions to human 'problems' (or perhaps more accurately 'problem humans'), as it appears to offer answers and 'certainty' in a world characterised by uncertainty and, on occasion, chaos. The products of its enterprise (psychometric tests, diagnostic screening tools, profiling techniques etc.) may bear the hallmarks of 'scientific rationality', however, they are often of extremely limited usefulness in the real world – a fact conceded by many of the proponents of these technologies (Borum, 2010). Perhaps of most concern in

relation to the focus of this paper is that, despite their fundamental shortcomings, such approaches are currently being used to provide the intellectual justification and the technological 'know-how' for normalising state practices of discipline and social control of Muslim children and young people – all in the name of 'safeguarding' them.

Counter-radicalisation practices as 'safeguarding' 'childhood'

Contemporary theorisations of the psychology of the 'would-be-terrorist' collide powerfully with institutionalised discourses of childhood vulnerability. Images and discourses of the 'vulnerable' child are ubiquitous in contemporary society and have huge affective power. They communicate stories of 'lost childhoods' due to abuse, neglect, disease and poverty – children as victims, children in danger, children at risk, children in need of protection. However, critical perspectives within the 'new sociology of childhood' point to the institutionalised processes through which children are constructed as 'vulnerable', exposing significant tensions and contradictions in these images and discourses of 'vulnerability'. Crucially, a distinction is drawn between the inherent vulnerability (a consequence of biological immaturity) and structural vulnerability of children, that 'comes about as a consequence of, and subsequently serves to reinforce, social and political mechanisms that reduce children's power, fail to take their agency into account and disregard their rights' (Powell and Smith, 2009: 138).

The social construction of childhood vulnerability originates in the 'idealised childhood' of the global North (Nieuwenhuys, 1998) – a childhood characterised by 'innocence', passivity and malleability and founded on essentialised theories of human development and the life-course (Burman, 1994). This model of childhood is hegemonic, ethnocentric and de-contextualised. Its superiority is assumed and is imposed on a global scale through the endorsement of one universal standard against which the quality of all childhoods are assessed – the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 – in a process described by Nieuwenhuys as 'the politics of contempt' (1998: 267). For Nieuwenhuys, the essentialised 'universal child' of the UNCRC denies the possibility of diverse childhoods and 'condemns 'other' styles of upbringing as a 'lack', or, to use the popular expression, of being "outside childhood"' (1998: 270).

The disciplines of psychology and psychiatry have performed a crucial role in the development and maintenance of this universal ideal model of childhood

giving 'scientific' credibility to an imaginary, universal 'normal' child – and, by extension, the 'abnormal' child (Rose, 1985). (Mis)assumptions about the developmental vulnerabilities and incapacities of children became institutionalised in State responses to children and young people via a myriad of child welfare laws, policies and practices, forming a complex 'disciplinary network' of regulation of childhood (Foucault, 1979). The structural vulnerability of children was further established through the application of 'the best interests of the child' rule in child welfare law, policy and practice – an unhelpful and much-abused phrase that has been used to deny children's rights to individual autonomy and to justify oppressive decision-making in their lives (Timimi, 2002). Not only did the 'psychological complex' (Rose, 1985) construct the 'ideal childhood', it also provided the State with technologies for correcting 'pathological' childhoods. The history of child 'welfare' law, policy and practice is thus replete with examples of 'interventions' aimed at restoring children to an imagined 'normal' childhood, evidencing the consequences for those children who do not behave as 'children'. This history continues to shape and inform contemporary responses to young British Muslims perceived as 'outside of childhood' and thus a potential threat to the state.

A textual analysis of the official literature on identifying and 'safeguarding' children and young people 'vulnerable to radicalisation' reveals problematic discursive constructions of 'childhood vulnerability' and children's mental health and well-being that prefigure and inform equally problematic constructions and practices of 'child protection'. As Burman suggests, treating such literature as text 'disrupts its scientism and naïve realist claims, and facilitates attention to how the knowledge, "facts", norms and models are the outcome of specific contextual productions and interactions' (2012: 425). Official policy guidance is replete with (mis)assumptions around what makes a child or young person 'vulnerable' to extremism and/or radicalisation. For example, in *Learning Together to Be Safe: a toolkit to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism* (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008), teachers are given advice on 'what can make a young person susceptible to adopting extremist views and supporting violence', as follows:

- 'May begin with a search for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging
- May be driven by the desire for 'adventure' and excitement
- Maybe driven by a desire to enhance the self esteem of the individual and promote their 'street cred'

- Is likely to involve identification with a charismatic individual and attraction to a group which can offer identity, social network and support' (DCSF, 2008: 17).

Underpinned by psychologising discourse, ostensibly innocuous thoughts, feelings and behaviours of children and young people are thus re-constructed as deviant and potentially dangerous. Without the initial framing of these features as indicative of a susceptibility to violent extremism, it is likely that any reasonable person would simply understand them as familiar characteristics of what it means to BE a child or young person.

Equally problematic, teachers are given examples of 'extremist narratives' to be alert to, as follows:

- to explain why I/my family/my community am/are experiencing disadvantage/suffering/lack of respect e.g. perceived persecution, inequality, oppression by a governing class, national or international politics
- to explain why the conventional family/school/community solutions do not provide answers to the core grievances e.g. "the law does not protect us, my family is isolated from 'real life' and does not know what it is like for young people. (DCSF, 2008: 16)

Again, read outside of their official framing as oppositional discourses and, therefore, constructed as deviant and potentially dangerous, these narratives could equally be understood as children and young people giving voice to experiences of social injustice. However, since children and young people in contemporary society are generally denied political agency, such expressions of political dissent are deemed to sit outside of 'normal' childhood, making it easy for such narratives to be pathologised as indicative of a dangerous mind in need of 'treatment' or 'correction'. Moreover, whilst the toolkit claims to take a 'universal' approach to tackling 'extremism', the text clearly has 'a blatant and specific focus on governing and regulating almost exclusively Muslim children and their behaviour and practices' (Sian and others, 2012: 243) and, as such, reinforces Islamophobic discourse and the construct of the 'Muslim terrorist other'. As Mirza (2010: 22) observes, *Learning Together to Be Safe*

...does not redress structural barriers such as institutional racism evident in schools, the job market, housing and provision of social services. It amounts to a form of deficit thinking whereby the attraction of extremist Islamist ideology, while seen as rooted in the marginalization and social exclusion of many young Muslims, is thought best addressed through

changing ideological threads rather than the structural nature of their isolation. In this way, those that are attracted or potentially so, to extremist views also become the problem themselves as extremism becomes constructed as something inherently embodied and much less to do with structures of power and domination which lead to marginalization.

As established earlier in the article, 'vulnerability to extremism' discourse is given powerful legitimacy via the development and application of positivistic psychological technologies. Screening and assessment tools to identify 'vulnerability to extremism' are now routinely used by practitioners under the rubric of children's safeguarding policies and procedures. The UK Home Office introduced the 'Vulnerability Assessment Framework' in April 2012 to assess the 'vulnerability' of those referred to its *Channel* programme (HM Government, 2012b). In this framework 'vulnerability to extremism' is assessed across three dimensions: 'engagement with a group, cause or ideology'; 'intent to cause harm'; and 'capability to cause harm'. Whilst the document clearly infers that robust 'scientific evidence' underpins the framework, advice on its use in practice is rather more equivocal, in fact confusing:

The dimensions are considered separately as experience has shown that it is possible to be engaged without intending to cause harm and that it is possible to intend to cause harm without being particularly engaged. Experience has also shown that it is possible to desist (stop intending to cause harm) without fully disengaging (remaining sympathetic to the cause); though losing sympathy with the cause (disengaging) will invariably result in desistance (loss of intent). (HM Government, 2012a: 11)

In assessing the dimension of 'engagement with a group, cause or ideology' the practitioner's attention is directed towards a list of possible 'psychological hooks' that may increase an individual's 'vulnerability' to such engagement. These include, amongst other things: feelings of grievance and injustice, feeling under threat, a need for identity, meaning and belonging, a desire for status, a desire for excitement and adventure, a need to dominate and control others, susceptibility to indoctrination, a desire for political or moral change, opportunistic involvement, family or friends involvement in extremism, being at a transitional time of life, being influenced or controlled by a group and, lastly, the catch-all category of 'relevant mental health issues'. Once again, however, a caveat is included that casts significant doubt as to the validity of the process:

There is no single route to terrorism nor is there a simple profile of those who become involved. For this reason, any attempt to derive a 'profile' can be misleading. It must not be assumed that these characteristics and experiences will necessarily lead to individuals becoming terrorists, or that these indicators are the only source of information required to make an appropriate assessment about vulnerability. (HM Government, 2012a: 12)

It is remarkable that practitioners are directed to use such screening and assessment tools as a routine part of their children's safeguarding practice, regardless of officially acknowledged misgivings concerning their reliability. Nevertheless, academic consultants and organisations specialising in 'counter extremism' and 'counter-radicalisation' continue to flourish and the mythology of scientific certainty persists, as typified in the following example from a local authority in the North West of England:

The screening and assessment tool has been developed by RISE, a local Counter Extremism Delivery Organisation, in partnership with the University of Ulster. It is an evidence based tool that assists agencies to safeguard vulnerable individuals. It uses leading edge identity analysis tools to identify value and belief systems that individuals hold, and establish the extent to which these build resilience or increase vulnerability to violent extremism. (Wigan Safeguarding Children Board, 2011)

'Safeguarding' practices employed under the rubric of *Prevent* and *Channel* also pose significant concerns for the civil liberties of Muslim children and youth. For example, while the Home Office strongly denies the accusation that practitioners are obliged to routinely share information about the children and young people they work with, many have expressed concern about the amount of detailed information they are encouraged to collect about the lives of young Muslims and the extent to which they are expected to engage in the monitoring, surveillance and mapping of Muslim communities on behalf of the State (Kundnani, 2009). This is demonstrated in research interviews with practitioners reported by the Institute of Race Relations in its *Evidence to the UK Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry on Preventing Violent Extremism*:

"If there are specific individuals at risk you would support them anyway out of a duty of care. But the local *Prevent* Board is asking for a more general map of Muslim communities. I make confidentiality promises to

young people, which I shouldn't break unless it is a matter of child protection or a criminal act." (Youth Project Manager, cited in Institute of Race Relations, 2010: 77)

This practitioner alludes to a fundamental problem facing all practitioners – the problems that arise when the state drives policy and practice in ways that are inconsistent with the professional norms and core values of their profession. Such moral and professional dilemmas are by no means new. Indeed, efforts to engage social work practitioners in critical reflection on their contradictory position as both allies of the oppressed poor and potential 'agents of the state' can be traced to the radical social work tradition of the 1970s (Bailey and Brake, 1975) and find contemporary expression in the analyses of those such as Ferguson and Woodward (2009); Jones and others (2004) and Lavalette and Ferguson (2007). Such theoretical perspectives are particularly pertinent in this situation in that they point to the desirability and feasibility of separating the professional, the personal and the political dimensions of practice (Guru, 2010; Ramon, 2008). As Gilligan observes, children and young people's practitioners are no less immune to the pervasiveness of discourses that pathologise and demonise Muslim communities, since they 'operate in and are informed by the cultural and social context in which they are situated' (2009: 128). As such, all non-Muslim practitioners should be alert to their potential complicity (however unintentional) in institutional anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia.

The notion of inherent childhood vulnerability, bolstered by the child's right to protection enshrined in the UNCRC and The Children Act 1989 is already hegemonic in child welfare theory and practice, providing the legitimacy for child protection and safeguarding practices in general. The coupling of vulnerability to radicalisation discourse with such a powerful overarching protectionist discourse and legislative framework provides a built-in resistance to questioning the legitimacy of enhanced state surveillance practices and interventions with young British Muslims. Indeed, it is tantamount to heresy to speak against such practices since their benevolence 'in the best interests of children' is automatically assumed. Thus authoritarian state practices (re-framed as 'quasi-egalitarian' interventions) 'move over time to become covert normalisation such that those who do not fit the norms are rendered deficient or pathological' (Burman, 2012: 431). Moreover, the re-framing of these interventions within protectionist 'children's rights' discourse distorts and disrespects notions of children and young people's participation rights, in the interest of the state and, as Burman argues, 'illustrates the discretionary character of the contemporary

neoliberal emphasis on freedom, autonomy and choice as being premised on making the 'right' choices' (2012: 430).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that, as currently formulated and practised, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation strategies aimed at safeguarding vulnerable children and young people from extremism are ill conceived, unreliable and give legitimacy to unjustifiable regulation and social control of young British Muslims. Underpinned by essentialised and racialised constructions of 'childhood vulnerability' and bolstered by pseudo-scientific 'psychology of radicalisation' discourse, education and welfare agencies are now strategically positioned at the forefront of the late 'war on terror' - recruited to institute normalising technologies that serve to reconstruct the Muslim child 'self' in line with the interests of the state. In this, children and young people's services practitioners are given a central role in 'soft' policing and disciplining British Muslim children and young people.

In many respects these practices resonate with wider developments that have come to characterise neo-liberal governmentality. An obsession with controlling 'risky' childhoods (Jackson and Scott, 1999) has shifted the emphasis from a focus on 'problems' to a focus on the prevention of *potential* 'problems'; promoting the dispersal of discipline through the 'universal' approach to child welfare (Hendrick, 2009). The 'pre-emptive' logic that informs *Prevent* and *Channel* interventions, with its goal of calculating future criminal (or in this case 'terrorist') risk, forms part of a worrying wider trend toward 'pre-emption' whereby professionals responses are increasingly based on the expectation that individuals are likely to commit criminal acts in the future rather than they have already done so.

Channel is about safeguarding children and adults from being drawn into committing terrorist-related activity. It is about early intervention to protect and divert people away from the risk they face before illegality occurs. (HM Government. 2012a: 4)

Significantly, the use of such pre-emptive logic prevents wider reflection on those conditions producing subjectivities (Burman, 2012). In the case of young British Muslims, it shifts attention away from the impact of broader social and environmental factors on their lives, namely 'the impact of racism, Islamophobia, social exclusion and everyday violence' (Institute of Race Relations, 2010: 79). Above all it denies young British Muslims social and

political agency. As argued by the Institute of Race Relations, 'young people need to be empowered to engage politically and contribute to society, not made to feel that their opinions have to meet with official approval' (2010: 79). The concern must be that such policies and practices are likely to contribute to, rather than offset a sense of isolation, marginalisation and alienation amongst many young British Muslims. Worryingly this may have the potential to generate and deepen, rather than ameliorate, mental health issues in the name of offering mental health interventions. Worryingly too, the pre-emptive pursuit of 'no ungoverned spaces' may not so much prevent radicalisation as the capacity of young British Muslims to engage in debate, evidence dissent, and grow into citizenship.

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